

pass down as usual. After the maintenance meeting, the night checkers and I headed back to camp to get some sleep before we started the whole routine over again.

It seemed like I just had gotten to sleep when someone started yelling my name and saying we were missing a tool. I thought I was having a bad dream, but it was worse. I arose, got dressed, and started walking to work. On my way in, I tried to remember everything we had done the night before. How could I have lost a tool and missed it at our morning ATAF?

When I got to work, my LPO pulled me out of the shop and told me they had found the tool, but only after they had recalled all the airborne jets from combat missions. When 523 returned, the mechs removed the tail-pipe door, pulled back the heat shield in the area where we had worked, and found the wrench. It was a one and a quarter-inch bonnie wrench. That moment marked one of the worst days in my life.

My division chief, the QAS, and the QAO counseled me. They pulled my CDI qualification for 30 days, wrote up my first report chit, and assigned me EMI. It was an excruciating long waiting game to see if the command was going to send me to captain's mast or handle it at the chief level.

They decided to let my chief handle it, but the harshest penalty was that I recognize that I had sent a

jet flying with a tool on board. The fact the aircraft were on a combat mission to protect ground troops killed my pride.

Ever since this incident, I have been a tool freak. I check tools all the time. If my guys leave tools lying around or have more tools in the jet than they have hands, I give them a really hard time and make them fix the problem before I walk away. I also no longer trust anyone with tools—no matter who they are. If they open a box, I make sure it gets checked when they are done using it. Even if they put it away when I'm not around, I go back, pull out the tools, and check them.

I was one of those people who said "nothing bad ever will happen to me." This mistake has helped me, in a weird way, because I no longer am complacent. I don't think I ever will lose another tool because that pain is something I don't want to face again.

This incident put me in the spotlight where no maintainer wants to be. Like other stories in *Mech*, I learned the hard way. Take my lesson to heart. Make sure you are doing required tool checks, and don't trust anyone, even if they are senior to you. It's your reputation and the safety of the aircrew on the line. 🙄

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Lost, Missing, Broken, or Worn

By AD1 Patricio Florendo

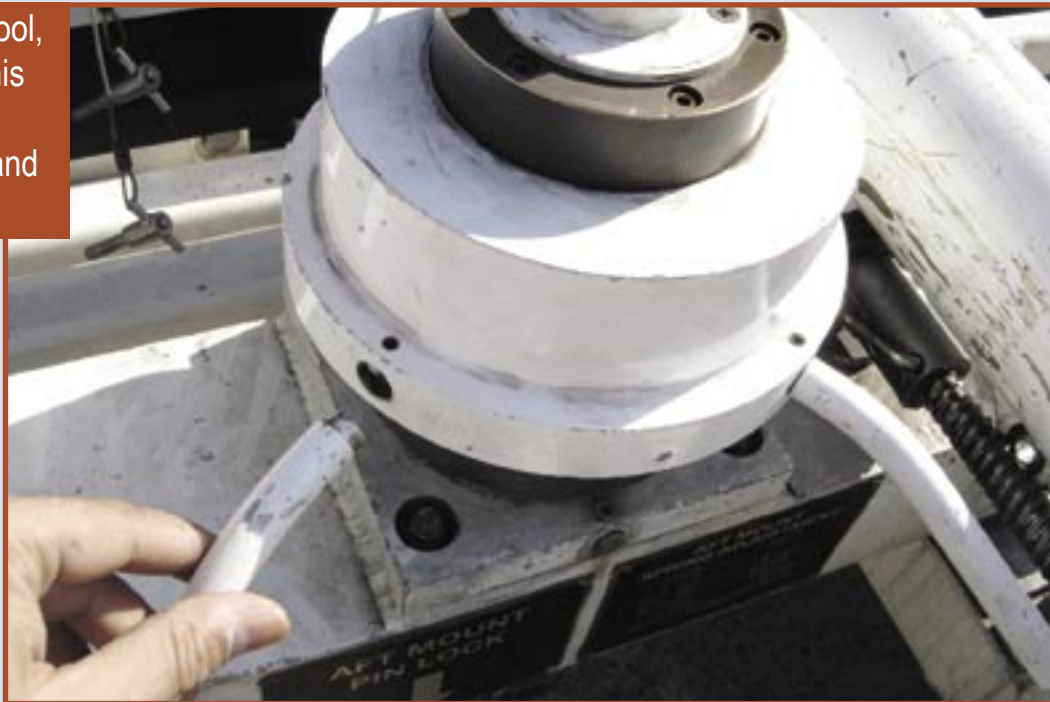
This story is going to read like many others in this magazine—it sounded familiar as I wrote it. That's the funny part about naval aviation maintenance. There are no new mistakes, just the same ones, with different people making them over and over again. I know because I made a simple and stupid one.

Our squadron was preparing for an upcoming detachment to the Japanese island of Iwo Jima. It was crunch time, and the maintenance pace was hectic. Part of our workload included removing two engines, with the potential for two more later that day. The

engine changes were made more difficult because the supporting activity had only one engine trailer (ETU-110 E/F) and adapter. To make matters worse, our sister squadron in the air wing already had checked out that piece of ground support equipment (GSE). I called them and arranged to get the trailer after they were finished.

Later that afternoon, I picked up the engine trailer and gave the sister squadron a tool tag. I did this because they originally had checked it out from AIMD, and I simply was borrowing it. The first shortcut had occurred because I was in a hurry.

Although not really a tool, the crank handle for this engine trailer must be accounted for before and after use.



To make matters worse, I didn't do a pre-operational inspection on the engine trailer. Of course, I didn't have an SE license for this piece of gear, either.

As is true in most other stories, we initially weren't having any problems. However, when we nearly were finished removing the engine, the spider crank was very difficult to turn. This turning is necessary to align the engine aft mount pin with the aft engine support—even if only minor adjustments are required. That tightly turning crank should have been our first clue that something was wrong, but we continued. Again, this part sounds too familiar.

One of my AD3s broke off the handle while trying to turn it, another clue that things weren't right. Again, though, we pressed on. We ignored better judgment because of a desire to get the job done.

Another AD3 took over and started to adjust the spider, and the next thing we heard was the sound of another handle breaking. At this point, common sense finally prevailed. We came to a complete stop to make sure we had all the parts accounted for. A spider crank has four handles, and we had broken two of them, accounting for the broken parts. However, we noticed that a third handle had been broken on the spider, and that handle was missing. I asked the two AD3s if either one knew where the third broken handle was. They said it already was missing when I had accepted the trailer. Of course, that skipped pre-op inspection would have highlighted that fact...another strike.

I returned to our sister squadron and retrieved the third handle. I then returned the broken piece of GSE to AIMD. Needless to say, they were very surprised when I showed up with an ETU-110, carrying three

broken handles. They also weren't too happy because our squadron hadn't checked out that piece of gear through them. As I left AIMD, the supervisor told me they would be submitting a misuse-and-abuse report.

My mistakes were obvious. First, I went to check out a piece of SE that I was not licensed to use. Second, I did not perform a proper pre-operational inspection. Had I done a static inspection and functional test, I would have seen that the ETU-110 already was damaged. Finally, I acquired a piece of SE without using proper issuing and transfer procedures. The support activity owns the ETU-110. Giving a tool tag to our sister squadron to take possession of that piece of gear doesn't keep AIMD informed of the whereabouts of their gear and doesn't properly update the transfer paperwork.

Bypassing established maintenance procedures jeopardizes equipment, safety, and your reputation. It is easy to lose sight of the big picture when we get so focused on accomplishing the task. Shortcuts or laziness, even on routine tasks, leads to bad maintenance or worse. In this case, it would have been only a matter of time before the engine would have rolled off the trailer. I was lucky and escaped with a report and damaged reputation. Learn from my mistake; it's the easiest way to learn. ✈

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